How to…
Work with and fund trusted voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to support engagement and facilitate co-production

1. Why is funding trusted community organisations a good idea?

There will be times when collaborating with a community organisation will be more appropriate and beneficial than delivering the engagement 'in-house.' Funding and partnering with trusted community organisations enables the ICS to access external expertise and capacity to engage with certain communities.

SEL ICS has been progressing its approach to better collaboration with the VCSE sector. The ICS has a Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnerships in place, supported by a VCSE Strategic Alliance. The Director and Alliance provide dedicated capacity and reach into the VCSE sector for our system.

Our system also has in place the SEL VCSE Charter, which provides a framework for equitable strategic collaboration with the VCSE sector in SEL, setting out four high level commitments towards the sector:

1. Developing a strategic partnership
2. Providing fair and sustainable funding
3. Reducing bureaucracy and supporting innovation
4. Building supporting infrastructure

The Charter was co-created by ICB executives and the VCSE Strategic Alliance and agreed by the Integrated Care Partnership in November 2023.

The ICS also has a South East London Director of Healthwatch in place. The six local Healthwatch are independent organisations and act as champions of public and patient voice in health and care services. Read more about South east London Healthwatch here.

Collaborating with VCSE organisations can be helpful to engagement because:

- VCSE organisations have unique relationships with and understanding of our communities and innovative perspectives on how to deliver care in a way which is meaningful for our communities.

- It recognises expertise and reach into communities where we do not hold those relationships or where we are not trusted.

- It can enable creative approaches in the design and delivery of engagement.
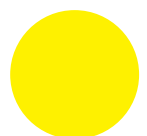
- It can help develop relationships with communities through partner organisations to enable ongoing conversations for future work.

- It can promote innovation and creativity – working with the community in different ways to achieve the desired outcome.

- Trusted community organisations can help us hear and amplify voices we would not otherwise reach.

2. Key considerations

Funding trusted community organisations takes resource and time. Important things to factor in include:

- **Budget** – you should make sure that you clearly explore the possible cost of collaborative engagement with VCSEs, and that you budget for full cost recovery for the VCSE who will be delivering the engagement. This will encourage a range of organisations to express an interest in working with you and will demonstrate that we as a system value the skills and expertise the VCSE bring. This is also in line with the approach we signed up to in the SEL ICS VCSE Charter. Full cost recovery includes all activity / project costs and a proportionate share of an organisation's overheads. Very small organisations may need some of the money in advance of undertaking engagement activities to cover their own costs, so bear this in mind.

- **Time** – if you are funding external organisations, this can take around six months from kick off to completion. You will need at least a month to procure one or multiple organisations (preparing a specification, sharing with organisations, giving space for them to ask questions and submit bids, review bids, agree, and onboard successful organisations). Those organisations will then need to plan, mobilise and advertise before they can undertake any engagement activities. Undertaking the engagement also takes time, whether it is a one-off event or a series of focus groups/ sessions over time. Once engagement is complete, and depending on what you are asking of them, they may need to analyse and report back their findings to you.

- **Planning** the engagement opportunity- you should aim to develop the engagement opportunity and the recruitment process for it with insight and guidance from the VCSE sector. This can help you understand if your budget and timescales are realistic, and whether your plan is accessible to and generates interest from diverse VCSE organisations. The ICS's Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnerships, the SEL VCSE Strategic Alliance, and the Director of SEL Healthwatch can provide support and insight to help shape your collaborative engagement opportunity.

- **Identifying organisations** – You will need to work with your engagement team and either the relevant place based VCSE infrastructure organisation or the SEL

VCSE Director of Collaboration and Partnerships to identify which local organisations might have the experience and reach to deliver this work for you. It is a good idea to approach organisations early to warm them up and get them interested in working with you. Arranging an information session before organisations submit their bids will help clarify expectations so that you get good quality responses.

- **Ensure a fair and transparent process** - you will need to ensure that the opportunity is open to and reaches all relevant organisations. At a south east London level, you will need to share the opportunity with both the SEL Healthwatch Director and the Director of VCSE Collaboration and Partnership. At a place level you will need to share it with the local Healthwatch, local VCSE umbrella organisations and the ICS Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnerships to send to their mailing lists. Make sure the information is put on your website and /or the let's talk engagement platform, sent to your contacts and also distributed via engagement and communication team's mailing lists- to enable a wide range of organisations to be aware of and apply for the opportunity. You should make sure that the selection process is accessible and does not exclude smaller VCSE organisations. You should have a clear plan for the selection process and make sure that decisions are being made in an open, equitable and transparent way. One way of doing that is ensuring you have diverse representation on your selection panel. To further support transparency you would publish the name of the successful organisation(s) and outline their work on your let's talk engagement project page.

- **Plan for mechanisms to feedback what you do with the information following the funded activity**– it is particularly important to provide feedback to those who have participated on what happens next. You need to think about whether you will be doing this or whether the organisation you fund will be doing this. It is also important that we do not compromise the community's trust in the VCSE by not acting on the insight gathered. Are you funding them to include a final report and a presentation pack to facilitate feedback? There are other ways of feeding back such as producing a video – the organisation(s) you fund may have ideas that work for the communities they work with. You should also consider how you would like to further share the insight gathered via the funded engagement activities with other interested parties across our system, and what role should the funded VCSE play in that. This will help with reducing 'engagement fatigue' within our communities and will ensure greater level of impact for your funded engagement. You can publish insight reports on your let's talk project page and the engagement team can help with publishing reports on the [what we have heard from local people web page](#).

3. Understanding and articulating what you want to achieve

Think about what you hope to achieve by funding one or multiple organisations to support you with your engagement.
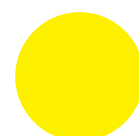
- What are you asking organisations to do?
- Is there flexibility or creativity in how and what is delivered?

Think about which communities you want to hear from and consider that VCSE organisations are well placed to also work with local people to not only listen and engage but to help identify and co-design solutions with local people and your programme and project. It is important not to assume those outside of the health and care system will understand what we mean, so be as clear as possible when explaining what you are asking for, especially when working with smaller grass roots organisations.

Once you can articulate what it is you are looking for, create a simple specification (see Appendix A for an example). The engagement team can advise you as you develop a specification for the work. the Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnerships can also offer you support and at a place level the relevant VCSE umbrella bodies should also be involved. The Director of South East London Healthwatch and the local Healthwatch could also advise on the specification. However, you need to be mindful whether any of these organisations are likely to bid for the work and you, therefore, need to manage any conflict of interests. The engagement team(s) can advise on this.

The specification needs to include all the key information, such as:

- Background of the project

- Scope of the work

- Whether you expect one organisation to deliver everything or if multiple organisations can bid for different parts (lots) of the work

- Key milestones and deadlines – including how long it will take for payment to come through

- Budget

- What you expect organisations to be responsible for

- Outcomes/deliverables/ key performance indicators/metrics for success that need to be met

- Anything that is not included in the funding

- How you will work together with organisations if they are successful and the support you will provide

- What criteria (an example can be found in Appendix B) you will use to decide who you will work with

- How interested organisations should apply for funding (an example expression of interest template can be found in Appendix C).
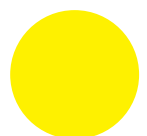
4. Understanding your organisation's procurement processes

Whilst we need to follow procurement processes, it is important to make things as simple as possible for organisations (particularly smaller ones) to work with you. Some may have very limited experience working with statutory services, including the NHS, in this way. It is important to explain, up front, what is needed, and when.

- Discuss your approach with a procurement lead to check how you will need to work together. Your budget will have an impact on how involved they might need to be. You need to try and make sure that the procurement process you are considering is proportionate to the funding you have available and the level of work you are asking for. One way of doing that is ensuring your Expression of Interest (EOI) process is straightforward and accessible.

- Confirm what information (as a minimum) you will need from bidders to get them set up on your payment system and to assure the organisation that the successful organisation(s) have been properly vetted/ quality assured. Often this includes providing bank details on their branded template, confirmation they are a registered charity/ voluntary sector organisation and a reference.

- Check the Standing Financial Instructions (SFIs) for your organisation to understand whether you need to; conduct a full procurement exercise or can proceed with at least one quote. However, you may still want to consider at least three quotes.

- Develop a light touch specification and expression of interest template for bidders to complete.

- Agree criteria for how you will assess bids when they come in. You should include criteria that helps you confirm whether the bidders have experience of working with, or ideally are embedded within, those communities you are looking to reach. Include diversity, equity and inclusion considerations in your assessment criteria. You can weight scoring criteria differently - i.e. with a focus on finance or on quality, and you should include this in your specification process.

- Depending on the scale of the work you are funding, procurement may send out the specification and expression of interest template or this may be something you have to do yourself. Be clear on what documents you need the bidding organisations to send back to you and by when; and who they can contact if they have any questions. Remember to send to the engagement team(s), Healthwatch and the VCSE.

- Establish a panel to assess bids, including inviting local people/ people with lived experience who are involved in the project / programme (and supporting them to participate in the process). You can also consider including key people such as the SEL Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration and Partnerships or representatives from the SEL VCSE Strategic Alliance and the Director of SEL

Healthwatch. When bids come in, panel members initially score each bid on their own then meet to moderate and agree a final score for each bid. The engagement team can advise on identifying local people to be involved in the process and what needs to be put in place to support them.

- If a bid (or multiple bids) score highly enough, contact the bidders in writing to confirm that they have been successful and outline what you are agreeing to fund them for. Be specific. Arrange a kick-off meeting to discuss the work further.

- For bids that did not score highly enough, provide constructive, timely feedback to the bidder to help them in future.

5. Top tips for funding trusted community organisations

1. Keep in regular contact to see how work is progressing and if there are any challenges they are facing that you can support with.

2. Discuss how involved they want you to be – do they feel having you attend activities they are planning will be helpful?

3. Recognise the power dynamics between yourself as the funder and the organisation(s) and think about how you can foster a long-term partnership with the organisation.

4. Take time in the kick-off phase to make sure organisations really understand the brief and will deliver what you are expecting. You can also use this time to further co-develop with the selected VCSE organisation(s) creative approaches for delivering the work.

5. Be clear what is negotiable and what is not. For example, do they need to collect certain data and whether you want interim progress reports?

6. Understand where organisations' strengths lie. For example, do they have relationships and opportunities with the community you are trying to reach but not the expertise to write up and analyse the findings? Could you partner differently with them to achieve your goals?

7. Be careful of asking too much. Consider what are the most important questions to answer or the most important communities to reach and prioritise those.

8. Be realistic about what you expect organisations to produce. Some organisations might not have the skills and expertise to produce academic style research and analysis but are the only ones able to gather insight from communities we are, otherwise, not able to reach.
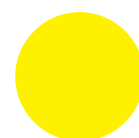
Appendix A – example specification

1. Introduction

This document outlines an opportunity to provide a proposal and quote to deliver targeted community engagement to support in developing our engagement strategy: working with people and communities. Having looked at existing insights and understanding communities experiencing the greatest health inequalities, we are looking to specifically engage the following target communities during this project:

Lot 1 Communities likely to have shared experiences	Lot 2 Communities specific to individual borough(s)
1. Those experiencing homelessness 2. Asylum seekers, refugees 3. Romani, Roma and Traveller communities 4. LGBTQI+ communities 5. Young people 6. Those experiencing digital exclusion 7. People working in the gig economy, on zero-hour contracts and those working irregular shift patterns	1. Nepalese and Bengali communities 2. Vietnamese communities 3. Latin American and Afghan communities 4. Somali women 5. Chinese community 6. Eastern European communities 7. Black African and Caribbean communities

Ideally, we would like to procure engagement from multiple community-led organisations that are embedded in and working with one or more of the above communities, who are able to act as a trusted voice and to encourage participation. Therefore, we encourage potential suppliers to submit proposals for parts of the full brief (set out in section 3) and to indicate, clearly, what they are and are not able to support with, tailoring their proposals and budgets accordingly. We are supportive of small organisations collaborating with one another to deliver what is set out in their proposals.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the nature of some patients' healthcare conditions concerned in our work, suppliers should submit proposals that demonstrate how they will engage (be that face to face, online or a combination) and be considerate of current government guidelines around face-to-face activities.
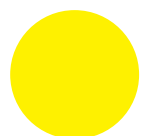
The timescale for completion of these activities is XXXX, although we will be awarding contracts and awarding funding XXXXX. Only potential suppliers that can deliver the outputs in this timescale need submit proposals.

2. Background

This is the first piece of large-scale engagement undertaken by the ICS. We are committed to working differently with local people and communities to develop trust and partnerships to support our work.

To develop our strategy, engagement work will focus on two main audiences: 1) communities we know experience health inequalities (delivered through this brief) 2) the wider population.

1.1 Engagement objectives

The purpose of this engagement programme is to:
- Share information about what the ICS is and what is does

- Build on previous engagement and data we have about inequalities experienced to ensure that we are reaching those communities

- Understand experiences from those experiencing health inequalities and seldom heard groups to inform our engagement strategy

- Develop, build and strengthen relationships with communities experiencing health inequalities so that we can: find the best ways to engage to enable us to develop and continue conversations; demonstrate we are listening and responding to what we have heard; feeding back to communities the difference their input has made.

1.2 Scope of engagement

At this stage, we are looking to engage with communities around the following topics:
- How individual circumstances affect day to day lives and health and wellbeing

- What barriers are faced in accessing health and care

- What we can do to reduce those barriers

- How we build relationships and earn trust within communities

- Understanding how we need to work differently to support communities to share their views with us.

3. Brief for potential suppliers

We are looking to fund multiple community-led organisations to deliver all or parts of the following two lots. Please use the supplier proposal template in Appendix A to structure your proposal.

Lot 1- Communities likely to have shared experiences

Suppliers are welcome to submit proposals that cover all or part(s) of this lot.

Targeting the following communities:

1. Those experiencing homelessness

2. Asylum seekers, refugees

3. Romani, Roma and Traveller communities

4. LGBTQI+ communities

5. Young people

6. Those experiencing digital exclusion

7. People working in the gig economy, on zero-hour contracts and those working irregular shift patterns

We would expect the supplier to demonstrate that participants from engagement are from a mix of demographic backgrounds and geographies.

**Lot 2 – Communities specific to individual borough(s)**

1. Nepalese and Bengali communities

2. Vietnamese communities

3. Latin American and Afghan communities

4. Somali women

5. Chinese community

6. Eastern European communities

7. Black African and Caribbean communities

We would expect the supplier to demonstrate that participants from engagement were from a mix of demographic backgrounds, within these communities.

Supplier responsibilities

The supplier would be responsible for:

● Designing appropriate engagement activities for the communities identified in the above Lots – where possible using creative and innovate methods

● Developing suitable plans and materials to support in delivering the engagement, which may include:

   o Communications / letters to recruit potential participants
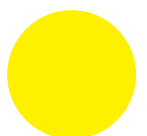
- o Event briefs for facilitators and co-facilitators
- o Topic guides

- Recruiting participants to engagement activities that match target communities set out in Lots 1 and 2 (depending on what elements the supplier is quoting for)

- Covering any costs associated with delivering the engagement activities, such as room hire, refreshments, reimbursements and printing.

- Agreeing the structure and content of any discussion groups/ surveys/ engagement activities with the ICS team, ensuring they align with the topics we are seeking feedback on

- Explaining how engagement will be made accessible to communities

- Deliver a **report of the findings** *(NB. Structure/ format of report to be discussed and agreed with ICS leads)*

  - ➢ **Analysis expectations-** due to the small financial envelope for this project, we are expecting a simple analysis of your findings.

  - ➢ **Report format** – we are flexible in how you present the feedback; however, it must be readable/ understandable and in a format that is accessible. We welcome written reports in word or PowerPoint and will also consider audio/video summaries of feedback. Photographs are welcome in enhancing your report, though we ask they do not form your entire report.

  - ➢ **Report content** – as a minimum, we are looking for your report to contain:
    - – The number of individuals engaged
    - – Which boroughs these individuals come from
    - – Demographic information about the people who shared their views (such as age, gender and ethnicity.)
    - – How you recruited people to speak to you (are they people you already work with, or did you use other methods to find them?)
    - – What engagement methods you used and the dates the engagement took place (such as focus groups and / or surveys.)
    - – Confirming the questions they were asked (we will work with you to agree these before engagement starts)
    - – What people told you – presenting the key themes in the feedback you heard and ordering them by importance or frequency
    - – If there were any differences in opinion from the community you were working with
    - – Quotes from participants to give examples of the kinds of received.
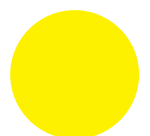
4. Relationship between the ICS and supplier

We value the opportunity to work with a range of local organisations, expert in working with particular communities. We welcome a collaborative approach to delivering the requirements summarised above. It is our expectation that the successful supplier(s) will work together with ICS leads and other suppliers (if we procure more than one supplier).

There may be times when you feel it is appropriate/ necessary for ICS leads to attend engagement sessions (for example to answer questions about the ICS and its work). We will find appropriate representation on such occasions. We are also keen to work with you to understand the best ways for us to feedback with the communities reached, so that they can understand how their feedback has influenced our work.

The XXXXXXX will oversee the day-to-day management of the above and the relationships with the suppliers.

5. Financial envelope

We expect to allocate around XXXXX to this piece of work, with a relatively even distribution of funding across the different communities we are aiming to target, meaning a budget of up to XXXXX for each part of each lot.

6. Submitting proposals

When providing a proposal, potential suppliers must clearly describe:
- Which Lots within the brief you are submitting a proposal for – this may be entire Lots or parts of different Lots

- How your skills and expertise is relevant to / will successfully support delivery with the target communities

- Your approach to delivery, including engagement methods and how you will reach the target communities within your Lot(s)

- How you plan to work with us and keep us updated with progress of engagement activities as well as any issues

- A breakdown of the estimated costs for each part of the brief (including staff time and expenses such as room hire and refreshments) they are applying to deliver - quotes must be based on 'outputs,' as opposed to day rates.

In addition, suppliers must note that:
- You need to submit your submissions to XXXXXXX in MS Word format, on the form included in Appendix A

- Potential supplies are responsible for the cost of preparing submissions, regardless of whether a submission is successful or unsuccessful
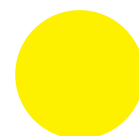
● The ICS are not obliged to take up any proposals that are submitted.
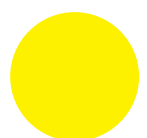
7. Submission timeline and start dates

The following timetable is a guide and may be subject to change.

| Task/ description	Timetable/ deadline
Invitation to quote shared	
Information session for suppliers	
Submission of proposals/ quotes	
ICS review of proposals/ quotes	
Outcome of decision communicated to all potential suppliers (whether successful or unsuccessful)	
Kick off meetings with successful suppliers	
All engagement work completed and feedback report delivered	

8. Questions and information session

Following our question and information session on XXXXX, we have produced a question and answer document which should support with any queries regarding the project. Please request this if you have not already received this.

If you have any further questions, please contact: XXXXXXX

Thank you for your interest.

Appendix B – example evaluation criteria

Criteria	Weighting
Understanding of the brief - Has the organisation demonstrated that they understand the purpose of the engagement? - Has the organisation demonstrated they understand the outputs we are looking for? - Does the proposal cover the communities we are looking to target?	10%
Credibility with the community - Have they demonstrated a strong existing relationship with the communities outlined in their proposal? - Have they had previous experience of engaging with these communities? - Have they demonstrated how they are able to access those communities if they do not have a direct relationship?	40%
Methodology - Have they outlined a clear methodology for engaging with those communities? - It is appropriate and in line with government guidance around face-to-face activities. - Has the supplier shown any creativity in their approach?	20%
Cost - Does it offer value for money in terms of reach into the target community? - Due to its scale, does it offer efficiencies?	30%
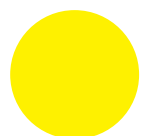
Appendix C – example expression of interest template

Name of the organisation	
Type of organisation: (i.e. Charity, CIC etc.)	
Contact details	
Please outline the specific communities your proposal covers (including the lot numbers i.e. 1B, 2A etc.)	
What direct skills and expertise/ relationships do you have in working with the communities identified in these lots?	
What engagement methods you plan to use? (i.e. face to face focus groups, telephone interviews etc.)	
How you will you identify and recruit participants to your engagement activities?	
What are your back-up plans if you are not getting the interest you expect?	
How will you keep us updated of progress and any issues?	
Breakdown of estimated costs including staff time and other expenses (based on outputs not day rates)	

Please submit completed expression of interest template to XXXXX